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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000620

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LH](#)
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVES KIRKILAS AS PRIME
MINISTER

REF: VILNIUS 610

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SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Lithuania's parliament overwhelmingly approved Acting Defense Minister Gediminas Kirkilas for the post of Prime Minister on July 4. The Social Democrat must submit the government's program and his proposed cabinet to the parliament by July 19, but may do so sooner. Zigmantas Balcytis will continue to serve as acting Prime Minister until the parliament approves the cabinet and the new government's program. The precise composition of the new cabinet is not yet clear. This Mission had an excellent relationship with Kirkilas while he was Minister of Defense. We expect more of the same as he moves to the PM's office. End summary.

KIRKILAS RECEIVES BROAD SUPPORT

¶2. (U) Lithuania's parliament confirmed acting Defense Minister Gediminas Kirkilas for the post of Prime Minister on July 4. Kirkilas received 86 votes in the parliament; 13 MPs voted against him, and 5 abstained. The 53 members of the Social Democrat-led coalition, which includes the Civil Democracy Party (a breakaway faction of the Labor Party), the Liberal and Center Union, and the National Farmers' Union, all supported Kirkilas, as did the Social Liberal and Labor parties. (Labor's support was surprising, because the party spent the days leading up to the vote raising questions about the validity of one of Kirkilas's university degrees and calling on President Adamkus to revoke his nomination of Kirkilas.) The Liberal Democrats (the party of impeached former President Rolandas Paksas) and the most of the conservative Liberal Movement voted against Kirkilas's candidacy. Two Liberal Movement members, two members of the conservative Homeland Union, and an independent abstained.

¶3. (U) The Homeland Union, the largest party on the right, did not participate in the vote, thereby lending support to Kirkilas's candidacy. Kirkilas needed to get a majority of the votes of those present to gain confirmation, meaning that an abstention was really a "no" vote. The Homeland Union's non-participation therefore implied support for Kirkilas's candidacy.

¶4. (U) Kirkilas told reporters after the vote that his 53-member center-left coalition intends to form a minority government. He also said that the Social Democrats should hold the most posts in the new government and hinted that parliamentary committee chairmanships could go to parties outside the coalition that supported his candidacy.

NEXT STEPS

15. (U) Lithuania's constitution gives Kirkilas 15 days to submit his cabinet and his government's program to the Seimas for approval. Parliament then has to vote on the cabinet and program within 15 days.

16. (SBU) Parliament may move more quickly than the constitution requires, as the current legislative session will end on July 20. The parliamentary leadership has approved, but not publicly released, the following timetable:

-- July 13 (Thursday) - The PM-designate will submit the government's program and the list of his cabinet members to the parliament.

-- July 18 (Tuesday) - The parliament will consider and vote on the government's program. A simple majority of those present must approve. Cabinet members will then take the oath of office, if approved.

17. (U) If MPs do not approve the government's program, they will return it to PM-designate. The PM must then present a revised version of the government program to the parliament within 10 days. If the parliament does not vote on the government's program within 30 days after the PM-designate's submission or if parliament disapproves the program twice in succession within 60 days, the President has the right to announce pre-term elections.

18. (U) Zigmantas Balcytis will continue to serve as acting Prime Minister, and current acting ministers will remain in their posts, until the new cabinet members take the oath of office.

COMMENT

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19. (SBU) The shape of the new cabinet is not yet clear and many pundits here say that Kirkilas will have a difficult task cobbling together a team that will win parliamentary approval. Kirkilas has already proven himself an adept dealmaker, however, garnering more parliamentary votes for his minority coalition than former PM Algirdas Brazauskas ever managed in leading two governments that enjoyed majority support in parliament. We think that the PM-designate's skill and the desire of most Lithuanian political leaders to get the latest crisis behind them will enable the new government to take office. This Mission has developed an excellent working relationship with Kirkilas in his role as Defense Minister, and we expect more of the same as he settles into a new role.

KELLY